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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between Irish Americans living in the United States and natives in Ireland. Although there is currently little interest or interaction between Irish Americans and Ireland, relationships can be found. The first part of this paper outlines the historical context of migration from Ireland to the United States. Among the topics discussed are repression of Irish Catholics by the English and the great famine of the 1840s. Immigrants to the United States initially were poor and uneducated, but now the Irish Americans as a minority group are extremely educated and economically successful. The main body of the paper explores four aspects of Irish-American culture and explains how they relate to Irish heritage. The four aspects are religion, politics, family, and arts and letters. With respect to religion, the paper discusses the differences between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, the role of the clergy and parishes, and a recent decline in religious devotion. In terms of politics, the paper explores the influence of Irish-political structure (precincts) and style (grass-roots personal interaction) upon American politics. Family life is described as being very different in Ireland, where family farming was traditional, as opposed to America, where most families live in urban settings. In terms of letters, a significant decline is noted in the once prolific writing and story-telling by natives in Ireland as opposed to Irish Americans today. (AV)

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TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES BETWEEN THE IRISH
IN AMERICA AND THE IRISH IN IRELAND

Ethnic Heritage Studies Project

1976

A Monograph

prepared by

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An article about the transnational linkages between Irish and Irish-American culture ought to be authored from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The native Irish seem to be much more aware of what their American relatives do than are American Irish cognizant of the conditions prevailing in Ireland today. There appears to be no evidence that the American Irish are interested in, or even really aware of, the conditions and events in the North. The abiding cruelty of life in Belfast escapes most American Irish except for what they read in predominantly British, influenced news reports.

Many Irish families have pictures of John and Robert Kennedy hanging on their walls, yet there are not many American Irish families with photographs of Eamon DeValera, Michael Collins, or Garret Fitzgerald on their mantelpieces. Be that as it may, while there are not crystal clear two-way linkages between the native Irish and their descendants in the United States, there are certainly subtle and latent cultural links which bind the two peoples together. These are the linkages we will be exploring in this paper.

There is, at the present time, a reawakening of interest in Irish heritage and Gaelic culture, particularly among young people in the United States. The University of Pittsburgh, among others, has an extensive program in the Gaelic language and in Irish musicology which is supported by a large number of the student body. At the same time the future of the Gaelic language in Ireland itself is in considerable doubt. Government programs and educational subsidies have not done the job in terms of insuring that there will be a great number of Gaelic speakers in years to come. What all of this means is that Gaelic culture is not a dead culture, but a living culture that will continue to change in Ireland and that the transplanted Gaelic culture which exists in the Irish-American communities in the United States will continue to go its own way and develop its own content.

America has been shaped and influenced by the various ethnic and racial groups that migrated here during successive waves from all over the world. The melting pot analogy has given way to the mosaic which in turn has fallen before the current stewpot characterization of ethnic assimilation and acculturation. Each component from each ethnic group contributes something to the whole American culture, but it also retains something of itself in the process. For example, there is a definite Irish flavor to much of American politics. Power brokers, wheeling and dealing, the leg man in the precincts, compromising, and the currency of personal loyalties all stem from the peculiarly Irish form of politics. Nonetheless, no one would say that the Irish-ness of American politics is so subsumed and so mixed in with all of the other components that it does not stand out all by itself in such characters as Richard J. Daley of Chicago and Daniel P. Moynihan, recently of the United Nations. The stew meat adds to the flavor of the whole creation without losing any of its characteristic flavor.

It is also true that the Irish-Americans today are not as consciously aware of the situation in Ireland as they were in 1910. Fifty years ago, events in Ireland were on the minds and lips of most Irish-Americans. They could tell you the characters and the political struggle; they took sides

and there were political organizations formed here. Today this is not the case. There are some civil rights organizations and benevolent societies that try to gather funds for Northern Ireland, but unfortunately one suspects that many of those funds wind up in casks of armament shipments and bombs. At any rate, these comprise a very small minority of Irish-Americans who are involved in dealing with Northern Ireland. The great majority of Irish-Americans are unaware of the events that go on in Belfast. Once again this does not mean that there are no transnational linkages between the two cultures; it just means that they are historically specified.

Another point that needs to be made by way of introduction is the fact that the Irish-Americans come basically in two religious forms -- Catholic and Protestant. It comes perhaps as something of a surprise to find out that one-half of all of the people in the United States who identify themselves as being of Irish heritage also identify themselves as being religiously Protestant. These are predominantly people in the South and in the border states, but there are also many of them in the older, more Americanized communities of the Northeast. For all intents and purposes in this monograph, we will be dealing with Irish-American Catholics; and in the section on religion, we will specify to a greater degree the relationship between religious identification and ethnic identification in the American Irish Catholic population. Historically speaking, it was Irish Protestants who moved here first from Northern Ireland and by way of Scotland. When the poorer Irish Catholic migrants came during the time of the famine, or the Great Hunger as it was known, these earlier Protestant migrants started identifying themselves as Scot-Irish or simply Americans. This was done in order to avoid being contaminated by the low status assigned to the new migrants.

Most ethnic groups have had to contend with stereotypes of themselves as a dominant factor in determining social policies aimed toward them. The Irish are no exception to this. Stereotypes are difficult things to talk about because they exist in the nooks and crannies of society and are seldom brought out for public examination. However, a couple of components of the stereotypes of Irish-American Catholics are as follows:

They now tend to be middle class and are predominantly in public service occupations such as police and firefighting, sometimes in law. They tend to be moderately well off and have a few more than the average number of children. They tend to be conservative, both religiously and socially, and the only thing they know about Ireland is that they celebrate St. Patrick's Day by drinking too much once a year. Actually some facts which we can apply to these kinds of stereotypes show a quite different picture. First of all, the American Irish Catholics are the most successful immigrant group in the country behind the Jews. (This does not include such groups as the Armenians, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Lebanese, and some others who are highly successful but are very difficult to find because they are so highly clustered within the population.) If it were not for the high levels of success of the Jews, the Irish Catholics would be known as an extremely successful and adaptive ethnic group. They also

do not tend to be conservatives, but rather are slightly left of center on most social issues and generally support progressive social legislation. And while it is true that the Irish in America do not know very much about Irish history or Irish culture and that they do tend to celebrate St. Patrick's Day as a vestigial remain of their Irish heritage, it is not true that this is the only time of the year that they drink. The Irish have very high rates of alcoholism in this country, higher than most ethnic groups, and it is because they tend to be very heavy drinkers. As one of the senior social scientists at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago once said, the reason stereotypes work at all is because they are at least half true.

Each ethnic group in this country has a unique history and a unique heritage and came to this country by a unique process. The Irish are no exception. What does distinguish the Irish from many of the other groups is that they are neither a historical minority nor do they fit into the captive nation's category as do the Poles, Latvians, Estonians, and so on. Although there are certainly political problems in Ireland with England, England does not own Ireland. Ireland is an independent member of the community of nations and is rapidly becoming known as one of the more successful developing nations because of its recent economic growth. Although the Irish are obviously a statistical minority, as are all ethnic groups in the United States, they are not a minority when it comes to certain powerful factions within the American society. For example, one-half of the American Catholic hierarchy is of Irish heritage, and one-third of the American Catholic priesthood is of Irish background. The Irish, like most immigrant groups, were an oppressed minority in this country at the time of their arrival, but they very quickly moved beyond that into the mainstream of American economic life. Because of these two situations -- not being an oppressed minority and not having a homeland held captive by another government -- there has not been the same kind of pressure within the Irish-American community to remain close to the cultural roots and the traditional heritages which they brought with them. In many ways it appears as though the Irish have been seduced in America by the promise that by becoming more American, they would be more successful, and therefore more accepted. It remains to be seen what price tag this seduction had attached to it.

Being Irish in America today is something of a blend of content and style. Recent work by Professor Terry Clark of the University of Chicago indicated that those cities where there is a predominance of Irish-Americans tend to spend more on public works and public expenditures than other cities.¹ Personal loyalty and friendship ties among Irish politicians almost border on ideology. However, being Irish is not so much concerned with content or ideological position; being Irish is more concerned with style. It's the way in which things are done -- not so much what things are done -- that counts. To understand something of style, it is necessary to understand something of the Irish use of language.

The Irish have a long-standing love affair with language. It is a fact, for example, that Irish speakers currently have a larger vocabulary

than average for the Irish people. Writers such as James Joyce and Flann O'Brien would never say anything simply or boringly if they could say it beautifully and with pungent flair. This love affair with language long predates our ability to speak English, but stems from a rich cultural tradition of the Celtic language which is now buried for all intents and purposes in libraries and in special sections of the country where only Celtic is spoken. The struggle to maintain linguistic purity has been well documented in modern Ireland. As mentioned before, however, it is an uphill struggle. The Irish language was not really meant to be written down, although Ireland has produced many great writers. It is essentially an oral tradition and meant to be spoken. It is a tradition of great stories and tall tales. An Irishman will never tell you a story in the most direct fashion. He will always approach it with a circuitousness that leads you along until you begin to wonder if he is ever going to get to the point. A good example of this is from the beginning of "John Duffy's Brother", a story by Flann O'Brien.²

Strictly speaking, this story should not be written or told at all. To write it or to tell it is to spread it. This is because the man who had the strange experience we are going to talk about never mentioned it to anybody and the fact that he kept his secret and sealed it up completely in his memory is the whole point of the story. Thus we must admit to that handicap at the beginning; that it is absurd for us to tell the story, absurd for anybody to listen to it, and unthinkable that anybody should believe it.

Now after this introduction and warning comment about how one should never tell this story, O'Brien goes on at some length, of course, to tell the story. If you take the story seriously, there is a good chance that you will go mad as is the case with many Irish writers. It is written with a sense of irony and a sense of humor and a sense of doom that is very difficult to comprehend if you try to approach it literally. With great Irish writers, you always get a sense that they are pulling your leg, that they are using language as a game to fool you in some way, not maliciously but impishly and mischievously perhaps. A hint to this frame of mind can be gotten when you look at the introduction by O'Brien to a marvelous book in which he writes a story about a man who thinks he is a bicycle, called "The Dalkey Archive."³

I dedicate these pages to my guardian angel impressing upon him that I am only fooling and warning him to see that there is no misunderstanding when I go home.

The key element to this state of mind is "I'm only fooling." Who is O'Brien fooling -- the reader, himself, his God, fate, maybe all of us. It is sometimes said of the Irish that they never say what they mean or mean what they say, or that they always answer a question with another question. Whatever the descriptive phrase one wants to use, it is true that the Irish like to fool around with language. They like to tease it, to cajole it, to play with words; and this is a pastime that goes way back into the dim prehistoric roots of the island.

We will notice this quality of style in a number of the different areas we will look at in this monograph. We will begin by examining the historical context for the migration and the current historical setting for Irish-Americans and for Irish in Ireland. We will then deal with four different aspects of Irish-American culture and compare them, where we can, to what we know about the same aspects of Irish culture in Ireland. The four aspects will be religion, politics, family, and the general sub-heading of letters, meaning the arts of writing and stories, plays and myths. At the end of all of this, we will try to see if we can specify and delineate more clearly some of the transnational linkages between Irish culture and what we now see as an Irish-American type of culture existing within the pluralistic context of our modern society.

Historical Setting

This section will be divided into two parts: The first part will deal with the historical context of the Irish in Ireland and a little bit of Irish history. The second part will deal with the historical context of the Irish migration to this country and what happened to the migrants once they came here.

The Homeland

Physical descriptions of Ireland abound and expensive picture books are forever being produced which tell the story of a fascinating country in words and pictures. One of the best modern attempts at this is Jill and Leon Uris's Ireland: A Terrible Beauty, in which are probed both the North and the South and the minds of the people who live there with a unique kind of poignancy. Jill Uris's pictures captured this poignancy and let us look at a country that is still in the process of growing and trying to heal very old wounds. The story of Ireland is not told in its physical description; for although it is a beautiful place, it is also a sorely troubled place. Ireland has always sought and never known unity. It has never wanted division; yet it has always been divided. In many ways, the story of Irish history is the story of a people's search for freedom -- freedom from the divisions which seem to keep them at each other's throats. I was in Ireland in the summer of 1960 when the United Nations's troops were being sent to police the outbreak of hostilities in the Congo. The Irish, under a Captain Donovan, were sent down in a battalion to help with the policing action. The Dublin papers were filled with the glorious news of the day and with apparent pride at having some of their own troops sent on a U.N. peace-keeping mission. However, as day after day wore on, we noticed that reports coming from shipboard had more to do with the outbreak of hostility and the incidence of fighting aboard ship among the Irish soldiers themselves than it did with anything else. It got so that the papers were remarking that it was hoped that the Irish would get to shore soon and begin with the policing action for fear that

they would annihilate each other if left on board the ship. This is an admittedly facetious treatment of a subject so serious that perhaps the only way to treat it is lightly.

Ancient Ireland was a divided country and the large divisions were the four provinces or kingdoms of Munster, Leinster, Connacht, and Ulster. Rulers of these provinces had no real power. They tended to quarrel with each other a great deal. The lords within the provinces also tended to quarrel with each other. All in all it was a very loosely organized federation capable of breaking apart and realigning at any time. The Roman conquerors never got as far as invading Ireland; and those people who did invade Ireland, such as the Danes and Normans, somehow seemed to find themselves merging into the culture rather than conquering it. G. K. Chesterton is reputed to have once remarked, "Some countries conquer other countries. The Irish conquered nations." We do know that pre-Christian Ireland was Celtic and the the Celts were fierce war-like people also given to flights of mysticism, great humor, and an earthiness that is quite unlike the stereotype of the reserved and repressed Irishman. Among other descriptions of the Celts, we can read this one from the Celtic Realms:⁴

In conversation they use few words and speak in riddles, for the most part hinting at things and leaving a great deal to be understood. They frequently exaggerate with the aim of extolling themselves and diminishing the status of others. They are boasters and threateners and given to bombastic self-dramatization and yet they are quick of mind and with good natural ability for learning. They have also lyric or poets whom they call bards. They sing to the accompaniment of instruments resembling lyres, sometimes a eulogy and sometimes a satire.

Another more poetic description of these people comes from G. K. Chesterton's work, The Ballad of the White Horse.⁵

His harp was carved and cunning,
His sword prompt and sharp,
And he was gay when he held the sword,
Sad when he held the harp.

For the great Gaels of Ireland
Are the men that God made mad,
For all their wars are merry,
And all their songs are sad.

He kept the Roman order,
He made the Christian sign;
But his eyes grew often blind and bright,
And the sea that rose in the rocks at night
Rose to his head like wine.

He made the sign of the cross of God,
He knew the Roman prayer,
But he had unreason in his heart
Because of the gods that were.

From the dim mists of prehistoric Celtic origins up until the 1920's there was never a legitimate and effective unified rule in Ireland. Some oppressors came in from the outside at various times and tried to impose such a rule, but generally they failed and were either forced out or just went away, perhaps deciding that the Irish weren't worth ruling after all. The Irish Free State government in 1920 was really the first native-born ruling body on the entire island, and even then it ruled only part of it. In reading Irish history, one of the things that recurs again and again is the fact that rebels, reformers, and revolutionaries constantly broke into factions themselves and were rarely effective in directing their efforts toward a common enemy. The problems of being a nation divided and the tremendously frustrating search for personal freedoms seem to go hand in hand in Ireland. To achieve national unity requires a certain amount of compromise and the subjugation of some individual freedom to national goals, a behavior which Irishmen traditionally find reprehensible.

The image of the rebellious Irish is not purely a stereotype. In the late 1100's, the Norman conquerors of England attempted to bring Ireland under their control, and thus began a period of bloody rebellion that continues to the present day. One of the first revolts was led by the Earl of Kildare, Silken Thomas, in 1537; he was followed by the Earl of Tyrone, Hugh O'Neill, in 1595. There was a lull of fifty years and rebellion broke out again in 1641 and 1649, the latter led by Owen Rowe O'Neill. Another forty years went by, and Patrick Sarsfield, in 1689, led an uprising. Another series of rebellions were suffered by Ireland a century later, begun by Wolfe Tone and United Irishmen in the "Rebellion of 1798," and continuing at intervals throughout the nineteenth century. There was an uprising led by Robert Emmett in 1803, the Young Ireland Uprising of 1848, and the Fenian Uprising of 1867. The current chapter of Irish rebellion dates from Easter Monday, 1916, when the Irish Free State forces seized the General Post Office in Dublin. The battle continues to this day against the residue of English oppression in the district of Ulster.

Why were the Irish so rebellious over all these years? Why did it prove so difficult for England, with all the resources of a great empire, to conquer the people on that small island and to bring them under effective control? A quotation from The Irish Question: 1840-1921 offers some insight:⁶

Resistance and rebellion were always unavailing, for a poverty-stricken and ill-disciplined people, whose distaste for compromise left them disunited in many crises, could not hope successfully to challenge the resources of an island power whose heritage was the dominion of the sea. Yet inasmuch as manifestations of the will to resist kept alive the spirit of resistance, they were not barren of result. . . . The English rulers of Ireland, having failed while yet there was time to take the measures necessary to conciliate a not unfriendly people, were confronted at the last by an Irish ideal which, alien to their outlook yet fostered by their misrule, was to prove a source of strength more resilient, because it was more single-minded, than any which a great Empire could command.

The "single-mindedness" of the Irish in their rebellion toward English rule was a driving force for almost five hundred years. It continues to be such. On the other side of this social equation, we have the attitude of the English government. One of the key characteristics of this attitude toward "the Irish problem" has been that they have consistently refused to take it very seriously. Even now, one gets a sense from the English press that they are tired of having to deal with the Irish. An English chief of police revealed something of the English notion of causality with regard to Ireland during the troubled times of the 1920's:⁷

There is nothing particularly fine about a group of moral decadents leading a superstitious minority into an epidemic of murder and violent crime, yet this is what has happened in recent years in Ireland. It is what has happened time and time again in the past, and it is what will happen again in the future. For the Irish problem is a problem of the Irish race, and is neither a byproduct of politics or of environment but is rooted in the racial characteristics of the people themselves.

An important complement to this attitude of the English government was the consequent legislation passed over a period of years which applied to life in Ireland.

From the early 1700's into the early 1900's a repressive set of laws attempted to control, and in fact to eliminate, the Catholic population in Ireland. The "Penal Laws", taken as a whole, made the assumption that there was no such legal person as an Irish Catholic. Neither the state nor individual persons had any responsibilities or obligations toward Irish Catholics, nor did Irish Catholics have any rights. These laws forbade the education of Catholic children either in Ireland or abroad. They forbade as well the establishment of any Catholic schools in Ireland. Marriages between Catholics performed by a priest and not by a minister of the Church of Ireland were considered invalid, and the children of such marriages were officially termed bastards. All priests in Ireland were commanded to register with the government or run the risk of being branded. Catholics were barred from the legal profession, the army, and the navy. Ownership of land by Catholics was severely restricted, and land could not be passed on to successive generations in toto but had to be divided among survivors. No Catholic was permitted to sell books or newspapers. In effect, the intention of the Penal Laws was to make Catholics in Ireland into nonpersons. This was to be the "final solution" to the Irish problem.

Survival under such conditions was difficult and must have left its mark on those who managed it. The characteristic circuitous use of words that was mentioned previously probably had its origins in the Penal Times. It was dangerous to be outspoken and direct in dealings with the government, so the Irish developed roundabout ways of addressing governmental authorities. The political maneuvering and manipulating probably had the same function. Also, there sprung up at this time many secret societies of Catholics in Ireland pledged to common defense. The "White Boys," the "Oak Boys," the "Steel Boys," the "Thrashers," and the "Defenders" are only a few of the groups who directed vigilante activity against the

English oppressors. These groups proved to be the seeds that were harvested later in the Fenians and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (which eventually became the Irish Republican Army).

The constant rebellion of the Irish, then, is not without cause, and is marked by two characteristics. (1) The single-mindedness of purpose that came to a people over long years, a purpose that had but one goal, to drive out the oppressors. (2) An organizational and symbolic voice which expressed the single-mindedness and which took the form basically of many secret societies. The most famous (or infamous, depending on your perspective) is the Irish Republican Army that considered itself to be the culmination of all the secret societies and which still exists. Basically it is an organization of underground terrorists who engage in guerilla warfare with the English and with the northern Irish Protestants. J. B. Bell, in his book The Secret Army--the IRA, 1916-1970, comments on the longevity of the IRA:

What is special about the IRA is not the errors and defeats, which are legion, or the old successes, which are splendid, but the continuity, however futile such persistence may seem to the rational. Scorned or discounted, the IRA continues. Che Gueveras come and go, EOKA or FLOSY win or lose, the Irgun disappears or the Mau Mau is crushed, or the Hungarian Freedom Fighters go into exile and the Algerians go into office; but the IRA remained generation after generation dedicated to Wolfe Tone, to physical force, and to the ultimate Republic.

A thirst for freedom and a fierce fighting soul that desired independence seemed to be characteristic of the people in almost every period of Irish history. The Penal Laws were instituted by men to dampen the fires of Irish patriotism and to extinguish the faith of Irish Catholicism. And while the Penal Laws were a great blow to Catholics in Ireland, they were no where near as devastating as "The Hunger."

The "Great Famine" of the 1840's was approximately equivalent in proportion to the Irish population of the nineteenth century as the holocaust of the twentieth century was to the Jews in Europe. In 1841 the population of Ireland was slightly over eight million people; by 1851 it was six and a half million. Given the normal rise of population, it should have been closer to nine million people. Between 1847 and 1850 approximately one million Irish Catholics died of hunger. While it is true that this famine was not "man made," it is also true that there is ample record to indicate that the British government did little to mitigate its effects. As a matter of fact, in the midst of this famine, the records show that the British government continued to export agricultural products from the island and, through the use of the Penal Laws, continued to make it difficult for Irishmen to farm their land.

The "Potato Famine" (still another name for it) was one of the great tragic disasters of modern times. It is very difficult for most of us living today to read the accounts of the Potato Famine and not be outraged

that such suffering was allowed. The images of people starving in the streets, children abandoned because their parents could not feed them or had died in the attempt, shiploads of almost dead bodies arriving on American and Canadian soil assault our sensibilities. The unofficial British government policy was that, all in all, the Famine was probably a good thing because it reduced the population of a troublesome country. Reading the accounts of the Famine, one can hardly help but make comparisons between the Nazi holocaust and the Irish Famine. The two big differences seem to be that the holocaust was perpetrated by men against other men, while the Famine was simply permitted to happen. As a result, the holocaust has been acknowledged and understood by the world as an example of man's inhumanity to man. A very bad thing happened to the Jews in Germany and Poland, and that fact has been acknowledged by the world today. The same kind of acknowledgement was never accorded to the bad things that happened to the Irish in the 1840's. Acknowledgement of this sort is important because it says to the people who have been persecuted, "You are valuable, and it should not have happened to you. It is not your fault." Without that acknowledgement, there is always the lingering doubt that perhaps you are not so valuable, perhaps it was your own fault, and perhaps there is no one else to be blamed.

The Great Hunger and the great migration from Ireland go hand in hand. Many people fled the island and its tragic sufferings and washed up on the shores of Canada and the United States, primarily, but also in England and Australia. They came with a severe distrust of the land, settling in cities instead. The land had let them down badly; they would not trust its bounty again. The great Famine and the migration are not in the consciousness of modern Irish-Americans to any significant degree. It is as though we have tried to blot out the memory of a horrible and ugly episode of our history. The early Irish immigrants who came to the shores of this country were not the subject of compassion and understanding. Rather they were unwelcome, unwanted, and despised -- even as they had been in their own land.

Contrary to popular opinion, most of the Famine Irish who migrated to this country did not speak English. It is hypothesized by some that the reason the Irish are called "turkeys" is because the Gaelic speech sounds like gobbling. They were probably an angry and resentful people. However, they were also probably a resourceful people, having developed, as so many people who must live under oppression do, ways of circumventing official bureaucracies and ways of surviving in alien societies. Life under the Penal Laws had enabled the Irish to hone their political skills to a fine art. Their political instincts were ready to be loosed upon the American scene. At the same time there was a driving sense of wanting to be respectable. The need to be an "American" was very strong. The need to achieve respectability and to prevent people from looking down on them was very great. These people were then a strange mixture of resentment and respectability. However, if time be the test, they appear to have buried their resentment and to have striven to attain respectability.

The New Land

Recent research on American ethnic groups has demonstrated that the Irish are among the most successful in economic and educational terms of all the American ethnic groups.⁹ They are second only to the Jews, who are so far out in front that no one is likely to catch them. Contrary to popular stereotype, the Irish are not lower middle class conservative civil servants; rather they now tend to be middle or upper middle class professionals or quasi-professionals who live in the suburbs. They are more likely to have gone to school, and their children are more likely to go on to graduate school than most of the immigrant groups in the country. This looks like a clean break with the past, the creation of a new people or a new group who have no connection at all to the oppressed and destitute thousands who came to these shores during the Famine. However, appearances can be deceiving.

During the 1880's, the Great Famine of the 1840's was almost repeated. Market prices for agricultural products had dropped, and the conditions were ripe for another, perhaps worse, famine. This time, however, things were different. The Irish migrants, particularly in America, took up the fight, publicized conditions in Ireland and the relationship between Ireland and England, and raised money to sustain the Irish people in their time of need. By this time also, the sentiments of the English people had changed. A new prime minister Gladstone was more sympathetic to pressures for home rule in Ireland. The primary instrument of the salvation of Ireland during this period was the Land League, created by Charles Stuart Parnell. However, even in the best of times, the traditional Irish tendency to divide and factionalize was apparent:¹⁰

The American Land League fulfilled its function of providing the home organization with money and moral support, but its history was never a happy one. From the outset, its members were divided by the hopes and tensions that had arisen in the 1870's. . . . Conflict among these factions was apparent from the beginning. In the New York hotel meeting to establish the American League, Parnell had proposed that each American branch forward money directly to Dublin, thus assuring that the balance of power would lie across the Atlantic. To this the Clan na Gael objected. They were not prepared to permit the American movement to become the tail of the kite. They wanted a centralized American organization in control of its own finances. The conservatives, however, feared the consequences of such control. Their concern may be traced back to the previous October when a DeVoy-inspired manifesto called upon Irish-Americans to ready themselves for the revolution that would inevitably arise out of the land agitation.

During this time the situation of the Irish in Ireland was foremost on the consciousness and tongues of the Irish in America. Many appeals were made that directed the Irish-American to think about his heritage

and to help with the situation at home. Money was sent and leadership was cultivated in this country which would be eventually exported to Ireland. In some ways, it is a paradox that instead of being influenced or being shaped by political events that occurred in Ireland, the American Irish instead took a hand in shaping the political events themselves. The economic and political support of the American Irish were certainly indispensable to the revolt which finally began in 1916 and continues in some ways to this very day.

The manager of the American help to Ireland was a man named Patrick Egan, the treasurer of the Land League, who operated from banks in Paris. Egan was remarkably efficient at sending money to Ireland and propaganda to America. He carefully avoided becoming embroiled in the factionalism of American Irish politics and, as a result, was able to generate a great deal of money for land reform efforts in Ireland. Meanwhile, the American Irish were choosing between Parnell and Davitt, each with a different approach to land reform. Parnell's was the more conservative; he called for some sort of compromise with English liberals. Davitt's approach was more radical and called for a continuation of the land war with nationalization of land in Ireland as an ultimate goal. The American Irish generally chose to support Parnell, who was the most charismatic Irish political leader of his time. He would make trips to America to generate money and became well known here among Irish-American families.

In 1883, the Irish National League of America was founded. Basically it supported Parnell in his efforts to achieve self government for Ireland. This was an important event because it was a clear case of an organization founded expressly on transnational linkages. The Irish-Americans were rapidly becoming political power brokers, moving into positions of political power in many large American cities. Their preponderant abilities in politics were standing them in good stead in this country. The National League sent significant quantities of money to Ireland to help in the land reform fight, and the outlook seemed bright. However, as in most of the history of the Irish, things are never what they seem.

Once again, factionalism divided the forces of reform. American politics on one side of the Atlantic and Parnell's goals on the other were seldom brought into congruence. In the fall of 1890, a personal scandal shook Parnell's constituency when he was named in a divorce case. The alliance between Parnell and Gladstone was broken at this time, and Parnell was driven from leadership of the Irish parliamentary party. An organization called the Irish National Federation was organized to rival the National League, and once again factionalism was out into the open. The American Irish assumed a posture of disillusioned neutrality. We may note that the following quotation seems by now to be all too familiar:¹¹

The last convention of the Irish National League of the United States was held in Chicago on October 1, 1891, a few days before Parnell died of exhaustion in his Brighton, England, home. The sparsely attended gathering elected Michael D. Gannon, the handsome Davenport, Iowa, lawyer to serve as the League's last president. In his address, he called upon the Irish to stand

together. 'The enemies of our race are great and powerful. Even here, in this broad and free land, we are the objects of their malice. We are today the least organized nationality in America, while we have the most to contend with.' The game, we may conclude, ended as it began, on a note of bitterness.

The National League, born of such great hopes, lasted approximately seven years.

For all of our previous historical discussion and notwithstanding the centuries of oppression and the history of cruelty, the American Irish today have very little real sense of history. There are some signs on the horizon that it may be coming back. Young people are becoming interested in heritage studies, and there are several excellent journals dealing with Irish-American culture. However, most Irish-Americans are quite without a sense of their own history.

There are really two groups of Irish-Americans in the country -- Catholics and Protestants. They are about as demographically different as two groups can be. More than half of the nine percent of the American population who identify themselves as being of Irish stock also identify themselves as being Protestant. These people are more likely to be rural and to identify themselves as Baptists. Differences between Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics in America are truly amazing. The Irish Catholics are number two among the ethnic groups in income, while the Irish Protestants are fourteenth out of sixteen. Irish Catholics are better educated and have more occupational prestige than do their Protestant countrymen. About the only thing similar is their family size; Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants are both slightly above the national average of 2.6 children, with Catholics having 2.6 children and Protestants having 2.7 children.

Two thirds of the Irish Catholics in America live in the northeast quadrant of the country, that is, the midwest, the northeast, and the middle Atlantic regions, while only one-quarter of the Protestant Irish live in the same section. Thirty-six percent of the Irish Catholics live in cities with over two million people, while only fourteen percent of the Irish Protestants live in cities that large. Fourteen percent of the Irish Catholics are college graduates, while only six percent of the Irish Protestants have graduated from college. Nineteen percent of the Irish Catholics are in professions of some kind, while only ten percent of the Irish Protestants are professionals. Differences go on, but this is a sufficient sampling to indicate that when one is talking about Irish-American ethnicity, one has to distinguish whether you are referring to Catholics or Protestants.¹²

For the purposes of discussing transnational linkages, we have limited our approach to talking about Irish Catholics because Ireland is still a predominantly Catholic country. Another reason is that we don't know very much about Irish Protestants in this country. They are not a very visible ethnic group and they frequently are lumped into the "other American" or

"other Protestant" categories in analyses. They don't appear to distinguish themselves by intense political activity, high visibility, intense religious activity, or any of the other characteristics that we have come to associate with the Irish Catholics. It may be that Irish Protestants make up the bulwark of what John Sheldon Reed calls "a new southern ethnic group." They are predominantly southern, predominantly rural, and predominantly Baptist. A good deal more research needs to be done to find out what kind of transnational linkages they may be carrying on in terms of their family structure, their attitudes about life, and the way they deal with their environmental contexts. However, until such research is done, we are going to have to be content dealing with the Irish Catholic portion of Irish-Americans. But then, as the Irish have always said, we have to make the best of a bad situation.

One unpleasant aspect of Irish-American culture, which might well be subsumed under this demographic summary, is the relationship between being Irish and drinking alcoholic beverages. The stereotype of the Irish drunk is unfortunately grounded in some fact. The Irish, among all the American ethnic groups, tend to be the heaviest drinkers; they also tend to be those who have higher rates of alcoholism. The stage characterization of the Irishman as the happy drunk is unfortunately the erroneous part of the stereotype. Alcoholics are not happy people. Looking back over the history of the Irish people, one finds a specter of factionalism and divisiveness haunting the political and social lives of the Irish. One finds the same thing on a personal level. Irish drinking is not done in the enjoyment of communal family style, nor is it done in the pleasant social surroundings of parties with good friends. It is done as a symptom of deeply divided and conflicting personalities, as divided and full of conflict as the country that bred them.¹³

How have the Irish managed to achieve so much in this society? Why have the Irish become the most successful of the white gentile American ethnic groups? Why do the Irish have such a problem with alcohol? A great deal more research needs to be done on these questions before we get firm answers, but a few hypotheses may be in order.

A combination of historical events and familial structural patterns may be responsible for some of these effects. What begins as an adaptation for a moment in history, such as circumlocution during the Penal Times, becomes transmuted over generations and time into a systematic personality characterized by avoidance, non-contact, and circuitous family structures in which children tend to feel ambivalent and pressured. These hypotheses will come up again and again in the sections on religion, politics, and the family. They will not be answered definitively, but we will try to present the boundaries of the questions as a precursor to a more systematic analysis.

Contemporary Irish Catholics in this country have come so far from their history that it may in fact be impossible to reconstruct the sources of many of the effects which we now witness. After all is said and done, we may find out that the price of coming to the new land and becoming the number two immigrant group was far greater than anyone had imagined.

Religion

Religion, broadly defined, has been a dominant part of Irish culture from prehistoric times. The Celts were certainly religious people in the sense that they were enamoured of ritual and mystic practices. The druids and the high priests of ancient Ireland were certainly on a par with sorcerers anywhere else in the world. The dominant cultural event for the ancient Irish was the conversion of the primordial religious awareness to devotional Catholicism. It is not true, as many assumed, that Ireland was always a Catholic country; it is not even true that St. Patrick was responsible for converting the Irish. The legacy of St. Patrick was not so much mass conversion as it was a system of monasteries around the island which eventually became the dominant religious structure of the island. Ireland did not have dioceses and bishops in the traditional sense of the word -- certainly not in the Roman sense of the word. It did, however, have an extensive monastery system in which each abbot was his own ruler. Frequently, abbots were also secular rulers as well as religious rulers. Women "abbesses" were not unknown. Irish abbots and abbesses were referred to as popes in their own territories because they tended to exercise absolute rule there. However, they were nevertheless loyal to Rome and to the popes. The Irish clergy and hierarchy have always been respectful of the pope if not particularly affectionate in their regard. A well-informed observer of the papal scene, Father Andrew Greeley, has commented:¹⁴

The Irish bishops seem a good deal more jealous of their own prerogatives and the independence of their tradition than do their American counterparts. It is not that the Irish hierarchy, clergy, and laity are in any sense antipapal or that the pope couldn't count on their support. I think rather that the Irish church is less concerned about Rome and feels quite capable of going its own way. Irish-American Catholicism seems to feel deeply inferior vis-a-vis Rome, Irish-Irish Catholicism seems to feel just a trifle superior.

The difference between Irish Catholicism in Ireland and Irish Catholicism in America has to do with the process of conversion. Irish Catholics came to this country as Catholics and have remained so rather steadfastly. Irish Catholicism began in Ireland as a minority movement and became identified with Irish culture through the secular and warlike activities of the abbots, bishops, and clergy. It was not uncommon in Ireland during the ninth and tenth centuries for abbots to make war on each other, sacking each other's abbeys, or to make war on kings and other secular rulers. But during this time there was no evidence that Catholicism was anything of a mass movement in Ireland. This changed around the time of the Great Hunger, in the mid-nineteenth century. According to research done by Emmett Larkin of the University of Chicago, there was something of a "devotional revolution" in Ireland between 1800 and 1900. In 1840 there was one priest for every three thousand people in Ireland; by 1900 there was one priest for every two hundred and fifty-five people.¹⁵ The level of

devotional practice rose dramatically. According to Larkin, it was a combination of the efforts of reformers such as Paul Cardinal Cullen and the horror of the Famine which drove people into the arms of devotional Catholicism. It may well be that this massive change of devotional practice in Ireland is a significant reason why Irish culture and devotional Catholicism are so strongly linked. This is a particularly important point when we consider the relationship between Irish identity and Catholic identity among people in the United States. To be Irish is to be Catholic for many people. As we mentioned before, the Irish Protestants in this country are something of an invisible ethnic group.

Both Catholics and Protestants in Ireland consider themselves to be fully Irish, just as Catholics and Protestants in this country consider themselves to be fully American. There is no exclusive linkage between being Catholic and being Irish in Ireland, as there tends to be in this country. Rather, the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in the north of Ireland stand out as an exception to the rule. In the south Catholics and Protestants can get along quite well. In a marvelous book called Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster by Rosemary Harris, the following commentary about the relationship between Protestants and Catholics at a local level is made:¹⁶

In this context he remarked to me (the informant) about Catholics, 'Sure what's the difference between us anyway, excepting we go out and demonstrate and get drunk on different dates.' The Protestant was both ambivalent himself and aware of the ambivalence of his Catholic neighbors. An attack, symbolic or actual, by local Catholics was an attack by friends. Treachery, therefore, was inevitably a constant psychological threat to the hill Protestant in a way that it could not possibly be to the more socially remote infield Protestant. The accusation seems to have been the result of the fact that a man's foes were (almost) those of his own house.

At the end of this book, the author makes a very salient point directed toward those who would engage in reform politics in northern Ireland:¹⁷

Those viewing the Catholics as the downtrodden working class and aware of some of the internal class-type dissension among unionists were quite sure that religion no longer mattered in northern Ireland. The important political program was that of uniting the poor against their exploiters. Had they known more about the social relationships underpinning the religious group membership of the ordinary people, these reformers might have been more careful to avoid a new polarization of Catholic and Protestant. Ulster, indeed, provides an illustration of the fact that a real understanding of a socially divided society, however its groups be defined, depends not only on an analysis of the political and economic structure at the top but also on an examination of the society at the grass roots level.

The grass roots process of self identity is quite different for the Irish in Ireland than it is for the Irish in America. Harris's book gives us a good description of how this works at the local level in Ireland; what is lacking is a comparable study of an Irish Catholic community in America. It is probable that the identities of Americans in this situation as being Irish or Catholic are considerably weaker than they are in Ireland. It is difficult to mobilize support in Irish-American communities here for northern Ireland or to mobilize interest in Irish culture and history. It is becoming more difficult to mobilize support under the banner of Catholicism in this country as well. The process of ecclesiastical reform combined with the effects of the Great Famine produced a devotional revolution in Ireland which successfully linked being Catholic with being Irish perhaps for all time. It did not, however, make Irishness the exclusive property of Catholics; it did not destroy the link between being Protestant and being Irish. Both Catholics and Protestants in Ireland consider themselves to be good Irishmen, loyal to Ireland, and having a love for Ireland in their hearts. After the migration to the United States, however, the only link between religion and culture that remained was that between being Catholic and Irish; there is no strong link, apparently, between being Protestant and Irish for Irish Protestants in America. They have assimilated and acculturated to the American situation, almost completely and retained little of their vestigial Irish culture. At least there is no evidence to indicate anything to the contrary.

Finally, before proceeding to a discussion of religion among the Irish Catholics in America, we will describe one of the crucial transnational links between Ireland and America, the concept of the priesthood. The role of the priest in Ireland and in America has been remarkably similar until recent times. The predominant characteristic of the attitude of the laity toward the clergy in Ireland is one of respect. It is a respect mixed with fear, resentment, and affection and filled with the typical Irish ambivalence. A personal account of the impact of Irish respect and Irish-American respect for the clergy is presented here by one such clerical observer:¹⁸

The Irish had immense respect for their clergy. That their respect was not unmixd with fear, particularly in the Old Country, can scarcely be denied. The nativist mistake, however, is to assume that the respect meant the Irish took their clerics all that seriously. What they missed completely is that the almost servile respect of Irish behavior toward their priest was in fact a devious Irish way of keeping the cleric in his place. Like most other sacred personages, the parish priest was and is the source of a good deal of ambivalence on the part of his people. Respect was a marvelous way of expressing that ambivalence. The priest is praised, honored, fawned upon, and not allowed for a second to step out of his priestly role. In the United States there seems to be more willingness on the part of the Irish to acknowledge the humanity of their priests and to give them some latitude in self-expression in personal relations. A number of times in Ireland, I have been surprised to note that interpersonal

cues that would have been met with a warm response in the south side of Chicago are neither liked nor understood by people who have very similar faces in Dublin, Galway, or Mayo. Their response to these cues was not just reverence; it was a warning, totally and effective, that I was stepping out of my proper role.

The priest is a personification of the religious symbols and traditions of the Irish Catholics, and as such, he is accorded a great deal of respect and a great but limited deal of power. The power is limited to that of a symbol. Priests, contrary to popular opinion, were seldom great political leaders or great authoritarian powers in their parishes. They were the symbol of the connection between being Irish and being Catholic, and this was especially true in the immigrant parishes. The priesthood and the local parish, for the American Irish, occupied something of the same symbolic role that the IRA with its goal of freedom from British oppression occupied in Ireland.

It comes as no surprise to anyone that Irish-Americans have a great deal of power in the Catholic church in this country. Thirty-five percent of the priests and fifty percent of the hierarchy of the American church are Irish. A peculiarly Irish brand of Catholicism has been extremely important in shaping the American church. The Irish clerical leaders almost always insisted on "Americanization" as the wave of the future. Their people were urged to be as American as possible as soon as possible. By almost any measure one uses, they were extremely successful at it.

In our recent study, Catholic Schools in a Declining Church, we discovered something about Irish Catholics that came as a great surprise. In 1963, Irish Catholic families said that they supported priestly vocations for their sons to the tune of eighty-eight percent, an overwhelming endorsement. In 1974, Irish Catholics had lowered their level of support for priestly vocations to forty-four percent; they had cut it in half over a ten-year period.¹⁹ This was only one in a series of declines in American Catholicism during the past decade, but it is an extremely important one. Irish Catholic families were almost priest factories; such a decline in support or encouragement levels has serious implications for recruiting priests into the ranks of the clergy in sufficient numbers to serve the Catholics of the church in years to come. It seems quite likely that there will be fewer priests in the future. Also, and more pertinent to our discussion of Irish Catholics, it now seems as though the traditional Irish respect and ambivalence toward their priests is turning into neutrality. By withdrawing their encouragement from their sons becoming priests, Irish Catholics are making as much of a comment on the state of the priesthood as they are on their wishes for their sons' future employment.

Another serious decline, although by no means limited to Irish Catholics, was the lowering of devotional levels during the past decade. For several decades (as long as anyone had been keeping records), well over seventy percent of the Catholics in this country went to mass once a week. Going to weekly mass was as much a part of being Catholic as was respect for the

pope. However, during the past ten years, the bottom has dropped out of the mass attendance market. Now less than half of the Catholics in the country attend mass once a week, and fully one-third of them go less than once a year. As has been said in other reports and other documentation, these declines can be traced to a lack of confidence in authority and leadership in the church, particularly in papal authority, and disagreement with the church's teaching on sexual ethics, particularly birth control. What is important to note in the present context is that the Irish Catholic pattern of decline is not different from anyone else's. They did not hold up any better than any of the other ethnic groups; and, in some cases, such as support of the priesthood, Irish declines are greater than other people's.

The most significant religious invention of the Irish in this country was the parochial structure of the American church. Other groups had parishes, and the history of the church is fraught with national parish strife versus diocesan parish strife. But still the parochial structure of the American church has been heavily influenced by Irish tradition. It did not do everything that it should have, and perhaps it did some things badly; but it was a social structure that worked for its people. Reformers and rationalizers of the future will do well to look back upon their history once in a while to see if they have left anything important behind.

Greeley makes this point very well:²⁰

All of this is a way of saying that both the anticlerical intellectuals and the anticlerical younger clergy ought perhaps to take a more sympathetic second look at the urban parish which they so enthusiastically decry. The current cliché suggests that the priest should build a community engaged in service, but the clergy in the immigrant parishes did build communities and did engage in service. The communities and their service were limited, of course, and the limitations are especially obvious to us who have the advantage of hindsight. But all human service and all human community have limitations. It can be said of the Irish immigrant parish, even in its present democratized, suburbanized forms, that it was a strong community and rendered service to large numbers of people. It displayed a tenacity and a vitality in the face of severe hardships and pressures.

The immigrant parish provided stability for those who were worried about losing their roots. It provided a place to stand and a home away from which one could move. Moving away is always a problem, and many Catholics have had the problem of moving away from their parishes emotionally as well as physically. The strains toward provincialism and narrowness are very strong, but it may be that we have to suffer the risk of those strains in order to attain a wider outlook on life.

What will happen to the American church and what will happen to the Irish Catholics in it? My own guess is that it seems likely that new ways of identifying with the church will evolve. The old crystalized identity

of being Irish Catholic is in many ways more cultural than it is religious. It has to do with the way one grew up, the way one was treated, and the way one looks at the world. Many people consider themselves to be Irish and Catholic, and yet are not particularly close to either tradition. This may continue and gradually people will move away from the tradition until it dies out altogether. Or it may be in for a resurgence of some kind of cultural Catholicism, as indicated for example by the renewed interest of young people in ethnic heritage. It is difficult to imagine that young people could study the heritage of their Irish forefathers without also coming to grips with some of the religious issues involved in that heritage. If this happens, we may well see a new form of religious identification which would be a sort of cultural Irish-Catholicism. Whatever the outcome, the institutional church will probably have less and less impact on people's lives as time goes on. If the efforts to keep parochial school systems operating and healthy are not successful, it will certainly sound the death knell for the institutional church as we know it. Recent research has shown that parochial schools are a great resource for producing people who are loyal to the institutional church and who are able to muddle through the changes and times of transition. Without that resource, the institution will have a very hard time indeed.

However, it must also be noted that the Catholic church has a two thousand year history of being able to survive in many different contexts. Anyone who bets on its demise is probably making a bad bet.

The transnational cultural linkages on a religious level between Ireland and the United States seem to hold up rather exclusively for Catholics, but not for Protestants. Once again, we must fall back on that elusive characteristic called "style" to describe the key variable linking Irish Catholicism in Ireland with Irish Catholicism in America. The two most influential symbolic links between the two cultures are priest and parish. We have seen that both of those are now changing in the current American context. The complicated mix of respect and ambivalence with which the Irish regard their clergy is seen on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. It is ironic that, in the current era of American Catholicism, the people seem to be returning to the distancing of the clergy that their ancestors did in Ireland. This follows a period of rather close contact with the clergy from the time of immigration to the present. The parochial experience of the American Irish is something that is burned deep into their memories but does not find its way out onto the printed page very often. Some of the writers since James Farrell have tried to grapple with the complexities of growing up in a Catholic parish, and most of them have done rather poorly. It is easy to focus on the trappings, on the cute behavior of the nuns, on the discipline problems, and on the myths that were passed along. What is difficult and elusive is the meaning of life in those contexts and the way in which one's parochial experience persists through the rest of one's life. Perhaps successive generations of Irish-American authors who are trying to investigate their own heritage will be able to come to grips with some of these problems.

Greeley has a final chapter in his book on Irish religion in which he treats this subject with traditional Irish ambivalence.²¹

Irish Catholicism both from the Old Country and the New World has, like all human religious forms, its limitations and inadequacies. Like all forms, the past is not what is needed in the present; but it does not follow therefore that for all its stubbornness, its narrowness, its Jansenism, its authoritarianism, immigrant Irish Catholicism did not respond rather well to the challenges it faced in the light of its own definitions. On the contrary, those various religious forms which are seeking to replace it would be fortunate to do as well.

The faith of the Irish immigrants was of great help to them during a very difficult period in their history. The real question now is whether that same faith can be of help to them and the rest of society as they move on, trying to grapple with post-immigrant society and the post-immigrant church. As in the case of the survival of the Roman Catholic Church, anyone who would bet against the faith of the Irish continuing to have an important influence in their lives would be making a bad bet.

Politics

We have alluded to the Irish love affair with politics before in this discussion. Now we would like to specify some of the relationships and some of those cultural linkages between Ireland and the United States.

One could approach the discussion of Irish politics from two directions: from the top on down, talking about the great successful Irish politicians in our country, or from the bottom up, talking about the cleverness of precinct organization and how well that particular style of behavior works politically. It is a shame we can't do both at the same time, but because we have talked throughout this discussion about symbols and how the Irish used them and the symbolic linkages between the Irish in Ireland and the Irish in this country, we will start with the symbolic quality of Irish leadership and begin our discussion from the top on down.

The single most dramatic event in the history of Irish Catholic political effort in this country was undoubtedly the election of John F. Kennedy as President of the United States in 1960. Any observer or participant of the Irish scene cannot help but be bemused by the fact that it was first of all an extremely close election (there are still persistent rumors that Mayor Daley stole the election in Illinois and thereby gave Kennedy a sufficient number of electoral votes to put him over). It was also a bitterly contested election with numerous dirty tricks on both sides. What was also remarkable was that Kennedy was not exactly a typical Irish Catholic by any means. Daniel Patrick Moynihan recalls that in the White House it was more than fashionable

to speak of Kennedy's disaffection with Catholicism;²²

I can recall as a young assistant secretary in the sub-cabinet of John F. Kennedy that just about every White House Aide I knew apart from O'Brien, O'Donnell, and Dungan would assert with near desperate need to believe that the president was not really Catholic in the sense that he believed all those things, that he was really more like a Unitarian. As for his brother, well, there could be no arguing his religious convictions, but then part of his value to the president lay in not being excessively refined.

The style of politics that got John F. Kennedy to the White House and the style of decision-making within that White House, as evidenced by what we know about the Cuban missile crisis, were spectacularly Irish. Strong personalities hammering out a position they could both live with, some giving and taking, was a style all too familiar to anyone who observed Irish politics in action. It was not a style without a certain deviousness or circuitousness, perhaps born of the Penal Times, as we have mentioned. But ultimately it was a style of man to man between persons. Contrast the style of circumlocution or deviousness, if you will, of the Kennedy years with what we know of the deviousness of the Nixon years. Kennedy's was a disarming deviousness, one for which most of the American people could apparently forgive him, if we look at the ratings of his performance. Nixon's was a bureaucratic deviousness that smacked of bigness and an all-consuming need to succeed, which the American people could not accept. The presidency is the tip of the symbolic iceberg of American politics, and the Kennedy victory was a victory for Irish Catholics in a very symbolic sense in this country. It ended a long period of nativism and a long period of discrimination at a very subtle level. Catholics felt that one of their own had made it into the upper reaches and they were delighted by it. After he was in office a few months some of them became less delighted; but again, that is a typically Irish ambivalence.

As we move down from the symbolic to the grass roots level, we come upon another symbol of Irish Catholic political endeavor--the precinct. The precinct was born in the urban sprawl of the immigrant cities as a way of bringing people into the political arena and engaging in political bartering with them. The precinct was not a social service organization in the sense that it had any high-minded ideals for helping people make their lives better, although I think it can be shown that precinct politics does in fact improve the quality of a great many people's lives. It was basically a marketplace, a place where votes were exchanged for services rendered. Sometimes more than votes were exchanged. Again, however, it was something that was on a very personal level. The precinct is not a bureaucratic organization; it's an organization of people who talk to each other face to face. A good precinct captain does not involve himself so much with filling out forms, taking requests for services and trying to help people get through the bureaucracy, although that is sometimes his function. Basically he keeps in touch, he gets

out on the street, he talks to people, and communicates their needs and desires back into the organization. A good precinct organization depends on people knocking on doors and being responsive to the day-to-day needs of people.²³ The politician's motivation for all this altruistic activity is not, in fact, altruism. Rather it is the desire and the need to gather power in order to move within the society. The accretion of power has always been at the source of good precinct organization. It's the way you get and keep power. As the historian T.N. Brown has noted:²⁴

Whatever were the psychological sources of the Irish-American drive for power, there is no doubt that politics was of crucial importance to their life in the United States. It was the scaling ladder they needed to climb out of poverty. For the great majority of Irish immigrants had neither the skills that make farmers and mechanics nor the experience and habits that make businessmen. They lacked even that kitchen culture possessed by German, Italian, and other immigrants which enabled the more ambitious members of these groups to lay the basis for a comfortable living by catering to the culinary needs of their countrymen. Like the American Negroes, the Irish were the unskilled of Anglo-Saxon culture. Unlike the Negroes, they had a strong sense of family and group solidarity, reinforced by their Catholicism and an old tradition of employing these traits in political activity.

Irish political style is something unique in the world of political styles. Research in this area indicates that both Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants in this country have similar political styles. That is, they engage in a wide range of political activities in a particular kind of way. Their political participation levels differ, with the Irish Protestants being very low-level participators and the Irish Catholic being high-level participators. But when they do what they do, they do it very much alike.²⁵ The Irish political style tends to be a personal confrontation style that involves all forms of political activity on a very personal level. In other words, they are not limited to petition signing, campaigning, or personal contact with politicians or constituents--they do all of these things and more. One of the most salient characteristics of the Irish political organizing style is that it works. John Petrocik, in an as yet unpublished paper, details how the political organization known as the Cook County Democratic Party won an unprecedented sixth mayoral term for its leader, Richard J. Daley.²⁶ Basically it comes down to an efficient use of governmental power to generate electoral successes. And it is generally conceded that the Chicago Democrats do this better than anyone else.

Irish political style may be found in large cities. Of particular note is Chicago, which is ruled by Richard J. Daley. To many people, the very mention of the words "Irish politician" conjures up images of smoke-

filled rooms, big black cigars, shiny cars, parades, and thousands of vague promises. However, in a truly pragmatic burst of philosophy, one is sometimes confronted with the thought of what else works any better? The quality of life in Chicago is probably no worse and maybe a little better than most other large cities. Certainly the tax base of the city is relatively secure, and the relationships between the various ethnic, bureaucratic and structural components of the city are at least not destructive, if not smooth-running. Daley is an Irish politician extraordinaire, but that is not to say that all Irish politicians have his talent. He is a man of great personal magnitude, talent, and charm. Two previous mayors, Kelly and Kennelly, were, in the first instance, rather successful in the Irish political style and in the second instance not very successful. "The machine," as it is known in Chicago, is now an Irish-dominated political operation, but it was invented by Anton Cermak, a Bohemian. There is no direct one-to-one evidence to believe that the Irish have an exclusive hold on various political styles; they do, however, appear to be able to engage in ethnic politics with a flair and a success that has rarely been seen in any other group.

Political identification for Irish Catholics is most frequently Democratic, and they tend to stay Democrats once they have made their choice. In the current era there is a tendency to non-affiliate; but there is no tendency for those who have chosen to be Democrats to dis-affiliate. In many parts of the country, the phrase "Irish-Catholic-Democrat" rolls off the tongue as one word. (As we have said before, the reason most stereotypes get to be stereotypes is because there is more than a little truth in them). The abiding question in Chicago politics is what will happen after Daley is gone (that is, assuming that he will indeed go one day)? What will probably happen is that some other ethnic group, most likely the blacks, will move in and adopt the political styles that were developed by Cermak and practiced so expertly by Daley and his confreres. Whether they will practice them so well is a question. It is difficult to see how anyone could do it any better than the Irish politicians have done. Perhaps it was their history of living under the Penal Laws, perhaps it was their history of dealing with an oppressive British government that has made Irish politicians so good. But it may be also that they simply enjoyed the game--that they engage in politics because it brings them into contact with people and because it is fun. After all, accumulating and wielding power can be an enjoyable enterprise.

The Family

Relationships between the Irish in Ireland and the Irish in America with regard to family structure and family style were bound to be rather tenuous, if only because the situations were so different. Ireland was a predominantly agrarian society and that was a major factor in the adaptation of the 'stem family' as a means of social organization. The 'stem' system is one in which the total family holdings, particularly land, are

inherited by only one offspring, usually the first-born son. This tends to produce specific social effects, such as having only one child in each generation marry. (Even as late as 1960 almost half the women in Ireland, and over 60 percent of the men between the ages of 15 and 49 were single. This proportion is considerably larger than most other countries.)²⁷

The 'stem family' system is in contrast to the 'joint family' in which land and other holdings are commonly owned by all the family members. As a consequence of the stem family practice, some siblings, as mentioned above, never married yet continued to live at home under the authority of the person who had inherited the farm. Although this practice enabled Irish families to survive after the Penal Laws had been abolished, it also meant that factionalism and disputes became a part of the Irish family style. As in so many facets of their culture, the Irish present paradoxes and contradictions in their public image of the family structure.

The positive consequences of the 'stem family' were an increase in familism and sibling solidarity. The needs of the family unit were paramount and individuals were subordinated to those needs. Differential treatment of siblings was not interpreted as injustice, but was seen in the light of the total requirements of the family. Even when children who were non-heirs left the farms and migrated to America and elsewhere, they retained enough loyalty to their family to contribute to its support from a distance. This was the difference in many instances between survival and extinction for those remaining in Ireland.

The negative consequences of the 'stem family' system were both internal and external to the family unit. Internally this system produced rivalry between the sons who were placed in the position of being competitors for the sole inheritance. Fathers tended to delay until the last possible moment their judgment about who would inherit the farm and this practice exacerbated the sibling rivalry. Age categories, as noted by Messenger and others, tended to delay maturity. Men under 40 years of age were commonly referred to as 'boys' or the familiar 'boyo.' Long years of dependence plus the dowry system of recruiting wives tended to produce very regulated lives for many Irish children.

Externally, many siblings left the home, which may or may not be considered a negative consequence, to migrate to other countries or to the urbanized regions of Ireland. Here economic conditions were little better but one could at least become independent from the family and parental regulation. As we shall soon see, it is likely that these factors left their mark on subsequent generations of Irish-Americans, albeit in subtle and latent characteristics of style and form.

The early histories of Irish-American family life can be found in the writings of Handlin, McCague and Adams. They do not make for pleasant or romanticized reading about immigrants and their joy at finding a new home. Living conditions were a combination of squalor, filth and disease which took a tremendous toll of both body and spirit. Infant mortality was high as was alcoholism and mental illness. The familism which had been so dominant in the 'old country' was severely

tested in the new country. Fathers had to leave the home to find work. In New York during the time the Erie Canal was being built, the Irish led all immigrants in the proportion of female-headed households. The parallels between the Irish family's confrontation with high-density urban life and the Southern Negro family's similar meeting, as documented by Herbert Gutman, are quite striking. Both groups appear to have had stable family structures until being placed in the cities of the North. 2

Mattis has noted that delayed marriage was still common in Irish-American communities in 1875, with 35 years being the mean age for men to marry and 31 years the mean age for women. These were 9 and 8 years above the native-born mean, respectively. It is commonly assumed that the reason for delayed marriages among the Irish in the United States is the same as that for the couples in the 'old country'--economics. The need for economic stability before establishing a household is a part of Irish heritage that only became exacerbated by the effects of the famine. Although existing in very different societies, Irish family structure and affective relationships in both America and Ireland bear more than coincidental similarities to one another.

Previous research has demonstrated these linkages and their persistence into the third and fourth generations. Irish-American college students react toward their parents as one would predict they would after reading the ethnographic literature. Irish-American women proved to be the most likely of the groups tested to espouse the traditional role for women which included keeping house and other domestic activities as opposed to a career orientation. However, paradoxically, they were also the group most likely to downgrade their own level of domestic skills. In other words they thought that a woman's place was in the home, and they thought of themselves as quite inadequate in that role. Incidentally, they were also the only group in the study who gave themselves negative scores on sexual attractiveness. 29

The paradoxical nature of the Irish continues with regard to personality studies. Research has shown that the Irish-Americans are the highest group on both measures of trust and fatalism. They are more willing to give others the benefit of the doubt, but they also are likely to think that everything is out of their hands anyway so it is none of their responsibility. The picture one gets of the Irish-American family, as opposed to that in Ireland, is one of a more torn family structure, one that is hanging on to its past by the thinnest of threads. The strain to be the most American of the Americans has taken its toll in the Irish family, yet the Celtic roots run so deep as to be next to impossible to exorcise completely.

One segment of the link between Ireland and America with regard to family structure that cannot be overlooked is the religious dimension. Whereas in Ireland religion was a pervasive part of life and did not stand out as such in this highly devotional society, in America the Irish form of devotion was highly visible. It is difficult to separate the effects of family and parish in Irish-American history because they are so closely intertwined. Families lived in parishes and were known by how well they

supported them. Parishes exerted control over the lives of people and gave them someplace to stand within society. Together with the concept of neighborhood and political precinct, parish was the touchstone of the Irish-American family life. It is questionable whether the Irish immigrants and their families actually believed the doctrinal propositions of the Church in all their totality. The fear of ostracism by the parish was most likely as great a deterrent to sinfulness as the fear of eternal fire, and it was certainly going to be the more immediate of the two. Whatever theological distinctions we might draw, the family existed within and depended upon the parish for support and definition.

A description of the way in which the Church supported specific familial roles is offered by Biddle in her commentary on Irish-American family life in the mid-twentieth century:³⁰

The church affected family life by supporting the traditional Irish family's way of doing things. When the man lost the tangible sign of the farm as the basis for family cohesion, he did not forfeit his authority and status as head of the family responsible for the economic welfare of all. Because the American Irish man's work took long hours, mothers were dominant in the family and even led some women to imagine they had effective or manipulative power. These views notwithstanding, husbands made most major decisions alone or perhaps after brief discussion with their wives.

Perhaps this pattern of "maternal dominance" combined with a lack of any real decision-making power is the cause of the frustration and harshness mentioned by so many different observers of the American-Irish family.

Several authors have observed that the usual method of socio-emotional control in the Irish-American family was ridicule. Dunne calls it "taking the mickey" and offers the following description:³¹

Next I shall discuss ridicule. Ridicule or taking the mickey or having a crack is a method of cutting others down to size, especially those who try to shake off the local apathy and get ahead, or show feelings for others. In other words, it is a form of psychological castration or mutilation, and is probably the most damaging single factor in Mayo life, acting as it often does as a social cloak for envy, bitterness, hatred and fear, thereby reducing the humanity of both the ridiculer and the ridiculed.

Biddle makes the following comment with regard to Irish-American speech patterns:³²

Another characteristic, the "put-down," arose from this value of understatement. The put-down was often used both as a method of control over family members and of putting

public personalities in perspective. And with the put-down came ridicule. Were another ethnic, religious or racial group mentioned in conversation, one could count on derision as a response. Name a public personality, an Irish politician, a pious parish member and out came a story from the past about the laughable traits of the person.

Greeley offers impressionistic evidence for various types of Irish women in the New World who trade on the guilts and failures of those around them and who acquire a good deal of power in the process. Once again we see the emergence of a paradoxical description of the Irish. They are a pleasant, fey people who delight in charming others with their stories and tales and who are among the most hospitable folk in the western world. On the other hand, they are harsh and repressed men and women who have great difficulty in speaking warmly and intimately to each other and to those they love. Well, nobody ever said that being Irish was supposed to make sense.

Enough of the traditional characteristics of family life in Ireland linger past the time of migration to leave the impression that the Irish are not quite yet fully assimilated:³³

Familism is prevalent and sibling loyalty is little diminished. Extended kinship gatherings occur regularly; the importance of kin cannot be emphasized too much. Children receive no-nonsense rearing, which stresses loyalty to the family unit and less concern about the total enhancement of each child's abilities and talents. Male domination has decreased, but the enthusiasm with which the Women's Liberation Movement has been greeted by some American Irish females indicates that differential treatment within the family in favor of boys has been their experience or that of their spouses. Alcohol is still used to enhance social occasions.

These are characteristics of the Irish that many observers of the Irish-American scene have noticed, and which for many families form direct links with their past. As usual they are a paradoxical set of linkages containing both familism and male chauvinism, loyalty and excessive dependence on alcohol. Some things seem to have been retained during migration and assimilation, and some seem to have been left behind. The stories of most ethnic groups can be told in describing which was which. The Irish, more than most, seem to have left many of their distinguishing characteristics behind them in an effort to become fully 'American.' This has been a great loss for the immigrants and their successors, but perhaps a greater loss for the rest of our society.

The Letters: A Conclusion

One of the things that the Irish do not do much any more is to write. For centuries the Irish were noted as storytellers and mystics, people who could cast a spell with their words and music. Now, if we are seen as distinct at all, we are known as politicians and drinkers and quite successful in a materialistic sort of way. Ireland had customarily produced writers as it rivers had produced salmon. There were so many of them they fell all over each other in the pubs. It was not a professional writing class such as can be found in the 'artistic' sections of most cities, but rather scattered throughout the land. Writers and storytellers were everywhere--driving milk lorries, directing traffic in uniform, pouring drinks behind a bar, or tending babies in a park. The Irish were in love with language and they played with it as a kitten likes to play with a ribbon. They spun dreams and created visions of what their life would be like in some far off better day. They inspired each other to strive and to suffer and to throw off the shackles of their oppressors. They came to America and successfully entered the mainstream of American life, and one might think the dreams had come true. However, there are few songs and stories, and by and large the Irish in America have let their traditional love affair with language cool to very dull, grey ashes. Why?

It may well be that silencing the storytellers was the price of acculturation for the Irish. It was almost as if the natives said, "Listen you Irish, you will be allowed to struggle up from your impoverished condition and enter our respectable ranks, but you've got to get rid of that troublesome teller of tales and singer of songs. He's embarrassing and he just won't fit." And, much to our shame, we agreed to keep the mouth shut and work diligently at becoming good little Americans. Recent events add a measure of evidence to this speculation. The recent United States ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Moynihan, is clearly in touch with his Irish heritage. His flair with words is one of his more appealing characteristics, yet it is also a talent likely to get him into a great deal of trouble. Pointing up foibles and exposing social and political inconsistencies are acceptable enough, if done with proper seriousness and bowing-and-scraping. If they are done with humor, and just a slight edge of irony or tongue-in-cheek however, all the demons of the establishment come falling on your head at once. Ask Mr. Moynihan.

The pushy, mouthy Irishman lost out to the sedate, rational professional with hardly a whimper being heard. Jimmy Cagney's brawling, smart-alec, charming "Rocky Sullivan" was co-opted in both the movies and real life by the tame side of the Irish personality as played by Pat O'Brien's "Father Jerry." You have to worry about how you look if you are going to get ahead, and being in love with words does not allow much time for looking in the mirror and checking up on yourself every day.

There is little doubt that the Irish in this country have been very successful, perhaps the most successful of the major immigrant

groups with the exception of the Jews. However success has come at a high price. The Irish in America are generally quite removed from their rich heritage and culture. One suspects however that the fires have just been banked, not extinguished. When we consider the young people taking courses in Gaelic or in Irish music, and when we hear the poems of some of our current minstrels, we wonder if there might not, one day, be a resurgence of storytelling and spellbinding among the American Irish. The following poem was not written during the Great Famine, but shortly after the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy:³⁴

I shall not to you give, my son, a heritage of splintered dreams
that slushed down the sink with stale beer and squeezed out tears
of pain for all the years that might have been if I had lived,
instead of killing dead my heart and ours, bit by bit, with
breaking rage and chunks of sorrow, passion which guilt turned
sour and then, misunderstanding took my soul and crashed it
in the night.

I shall not go desperate dying into life.

The enemy that dares to take the sea's surge from our eyes
I shall defy and drag to hell and back and shake the skull of
suicide which says the gift will be ungiven and the hope denied.
No, for we shall sing, my son, and eat the sweets of victory.
Lie peaceful down your head, this hunger will not be quieted,
nor ever fully fed.

Not before we hold the stars and until then, we'll go a'brawling
and wooing life, there're fights to be fought and battles won,
but never in the name of life direct our own undoing,
nor allow while we breathe that Life should be undone.

"Trans-national linkages" is a very rationalized term for such buried strength and passion. The Irish-American culture is filled with latent songs and tears mixed together with bravado and the trappings of success. Underneath the social science jargon, there is something of the Celtic past which remains in the Irish no matter where they land. It may lie dormant for a long time, but every so often it raises its head just to let you know it is still there. A poet emerges here or there, a politician rises who teaches the rest of them what politics is really all about, a statesman conducts the affairs of a great nation with unusual wit and flair. These are not 'odd occurrences'; they are signs of what lies beneath. It may well be that as time progresses and as materialism takes its toll of the Irish spirit, we will see fewer and fewer of these signs, until they are no more. It may well be, but don't count on it.

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